

April 1977

George Washington Owens

By Anthony J. Seals

George Washington Owens (1875-1950) entered Kansas State Agricultural College, later named Kansas State University, in January of 1896. Less than four years later, in June 1899, Owens became the first black graduate of K-State.

He was born January 21, 1875, on a farm near Alma, Kansas, some 40 miles west of Topeka. Both of his parents, Samuel and Ana Owens, were ex-slaves who migrated from central Tennessee in the early 1870s.

When George's father came to Kansas, like many other black farmers with small funds, he found it necessary to rent land. He looked around for free public lands to homestead until he finally secured 50 acres of school land, 7 or 8 miles west of Alma, Kansas. The land was wild and hilly with a rather clay-like subsoil. Here his father built a crude home of native stone.

George Owens spent his early years either working on his father's farm or was hired to work for neighbors, many of whom were foreigners.

In the winter George attended the local district school. He and his brothers and sisters were sometimes the only black pupils.

George came to be quite a local celebrity, because he was the winner of spelling contests all over the region.

He was considered very apt and ambitious, eager to learn, ready to read any literature to which he had access, even old books, papers and journals. He also read all the histories he could secure—ancient, medieval or current.

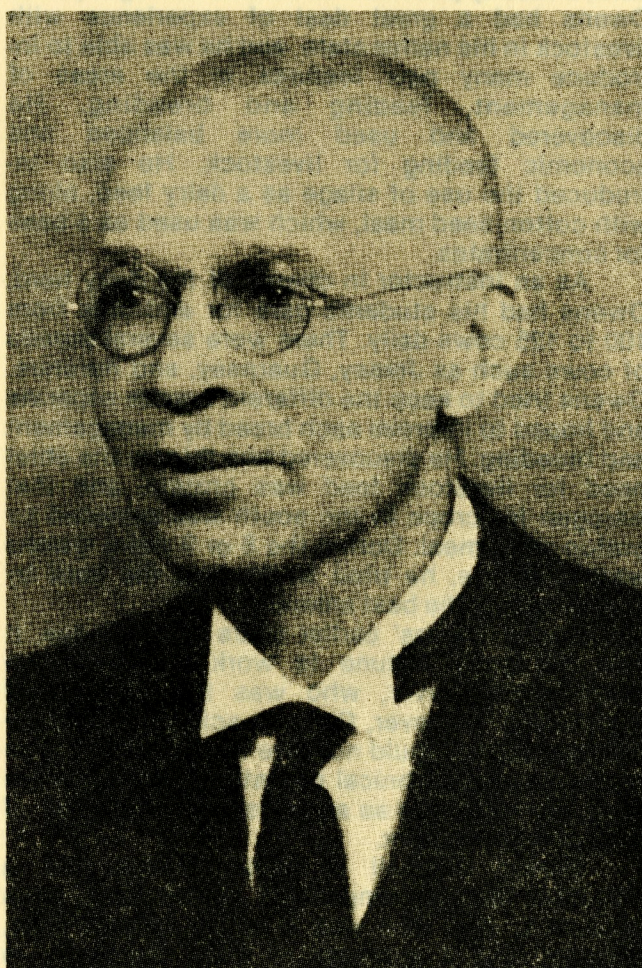
In the winter he attended school when possible, while in the summer he worked on local farms caring for the livestock.

For several years he worked on farms owned by settlers. During this time George was fortunate to meet a young white man, Charles Smith, who boarded where George worked. Smith was a teacher at the local high school, and lived in Manhattan, Kansas, where the State Agriculture College was located.

Smith became interested in Owens' desire to study and encouraged him to apply for permission

to work his way through the college course. George agreed, and as soon as he made the necessary arrangements, caught a freight train to Manhattan.

In Manhattan, George took the local examination for a teacher's certificate (he found work on a local farm). He passed it with good grades but had no school to teach; he knew of only one small school for black children which



was taught by a black woman by the name of Miss DePriest. George would not see a black doctor, lawyer or any other black professional until he later went south.

On January 1, 1896, George W. Owens enrolled in the Kansas State Agricultural College. He found to his surprise that he was the only black student enrolled in the college.

During the college terms, and for two summers, he worked on the college farm, in the dairy and as a janitor. Other summers were spent laboring on farms and railroads; shoveling coal and working in the harvest.

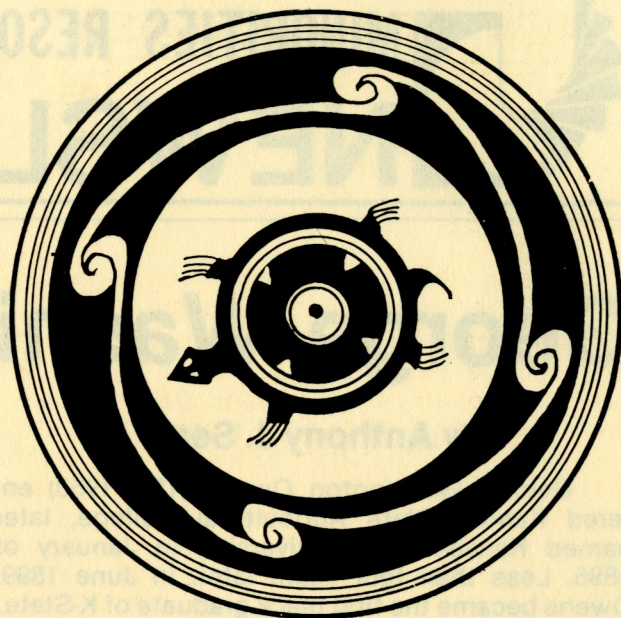
In the summer of 1899 George made a trip to Oklahoma as a harvest hand, working in the field and later with the threshing crews. Later in August, 1899, George spent 3 or 4 weeks working in the creamery at the Iowa State Agricultural College at Ames, learning dairy management and organization. He also took special work in butter and cheese making before going to Tuskegee Institute at Tuskegee, Alabama, in September 1899.

At Tuskegee, Owens met Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver and others with whom he formed life time friendships. The next year Owens took charge of the dairy herd, a faculty post he was to hold for eight years. Owens had a great deal of experience with livestock in his native state, and he was able to introduce many new features in the areas of management, feeding and breeding. He discovered and used more balanced and economic feeding for livestock. He also introduced the use of silage as a dairy feed, along with cotton seed meal, which was used as a base for concentrates.

As an instructor in charge of the dairy herd, Owens had his students care for and milk from 100 to 125 cows daily. There were several breeds of cows such as Jersey, Guernsey, and Ayrshire. Owens tried to keep the different breeds separate and hoped to improve each breed by management and breeding. He discovered two things: the chief need for livestock feed was protein, and that nitrogen for crops in the south was provided by cotton seed meal. During the 8 or 9 years Owens was in charge, he tried to improve the herd by breeding only the best animals.

During Owens' earlier years at Tuskegee, it was his good fortune to work under George Washington Carver, who was the director of agriculture. However, Carver's scientific work increased and he could not give the necessary time to the various technical operations of the school farm, but he served as an advisor on all phases of the agricultural work.

During the fall of 1900, George met a beautiful and accomplished young lady, Miss Waddie L. Hill. She was a native of LaGrange, Georgia, and a graduate of Clark University in



Atlanta, Georgia. They married August 29, 1901. They had four children: Emma, George, Ana and a boy who died as a baby in 1902. They enjoyed married life for over 20 years, until Waddie's death in Virginia, November 23, 1921.

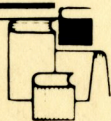
In 1908, Owens was called to Virginia Normal and Industrial Institute, later known as Virginia State College, Petersburg, Virginia, to establish the agricultural program of the institution. He served as head of the agricultural department until 1927.

With the passage of the National Vocational Educational Act in 1917, Owens' duties were enlarged to that of state teacher-trainer in agricultural education. This was due to the simultaneous growth of the Department of Agriculture and Vocational Education in Agriculture in Virginia. Owens left his duties as head of the agricultural department at Virginia State in 1927, to devote his entire time to the rapidly growing number of departments of vocational agriculture in the State of Virginia.

Owens was a dynamic figure in the development of agricultural education in both secondary and collegiate schools throughout the south. The part he played in the founding and developing of the New Farmers of America, a national organization of black farm boys studying vocational agriculture, is regarded as another of his major achievements.

In recognition of his contribution to the cause of agricultural development in the State of Virginia, officials named the agricultural building on the college campus in his honor. Owens was also active in civic affairs. He was a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha graduate chapter and a vestryman at Saint Stevens Episcopal Church in Petersburg, Virginia.

NEW ACQUISITIONS



CASSETTES...

How Tests Fail. A five-part tape series on minorities in the educational process.

Afro-American Children's Literature. Three-part tape lecture series on children. There is the discussion of the negative image of Black women, tracing of the historical development of Black literature and guidelines for parents in the selecting of Black books and the avoidance of books that carry racist and sexist stereotypes.

FILMS...

North from Mexico. The migration of Mexican people and their culture from Mexico to the United States. Color.

Double Day. Deals with the problems Latin American women are facing in the need to work outside the home and still have complete responsibility for the upkeep of the home and the rearing of children. Color.

BOOKS...

The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1730-1925 by Herbert G. Gutman. A Study of the Afro-American family. Herbert Gutman tried to lay to rest the Daniel P. Moynihan report that slavery destroyed the Black family structure. Gutman sees the Black family from the earliest days of slavery until the eve of the Great Depression as being close, strong, and intact.

Rain of Scorpions and other writings by Estela Portillo Trambley. A collection of short writings by Estela Portillo Trambley, the first Chicana to have a book published of her own literary works.

Camposantos. A historical photographic essay, Camposantos is a gravesite of New Mexico. Here the authors lend comment and awareness to the last cultural expression of Spanish-American religious burial traditions.

The Minorities Resource and Research Center Newsletter is a bimonthly publication. This is the final issue of the 1976-77 school year.

Antonia Quintana Pigno, Director, The Minorities Resource and Research Center. Farrell Library, Kansas State University. 532-6516 Ext. 51.

Anthony J. Seals, Editor

FILMSTRIPS...

The Role of Indians in the American Revolution. Explains the outcome American Indians had on the American Revolution. Color.

The First Americans: Culture Patterns. A look at prehistoric Indian groups of North America. To expel the myth that the Pilgrims/Puritans were the "First Americans."

Black Spectrum: Leadership Strategies in the Black Community. Julian Bond narrates this series of filmstrips on the variety of leadership strategies in the American Black Community. He speaks with such leaders as Jesse Jackson, Whitney Young, Jr., John Lewis, LeRoi Jones, Dr. Thomas W. Matthew and Kenneth Gibson.

NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES...

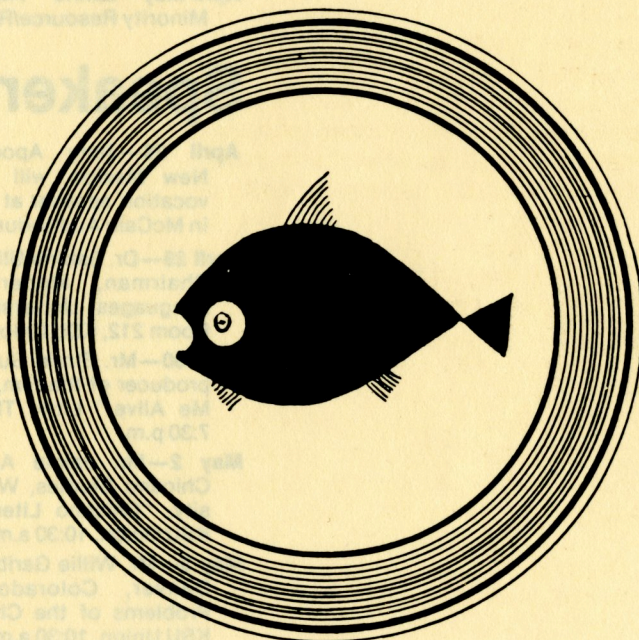
Black Stars. A magazine covering Black entertainment, recording and top Black stars of the day. A Johnson Publication.

Encore. The International and National news magazine covering Black related social, political, and contemporary issues of the day.

Nosotros. A Spanish magazine covering international and national politics of Mexico and Latin America.

TRANSPARENCY...

Black Chronicle. Historical information from the Black perspective. Also a newspaper that conveys the problem of Black history from February 1778 to November 1950.





MINORITIES RESOURCE AND RESEARCH CENTER

Farrell Library
Kansas State University
Manhattan, Kansas 66506

CALENDAR



Conferences

April 22-23—Second Annual Kansas State Conference on Bilingual Education

April 23-May 5—Kansas State University MECHA Latino Awareness Series*

Exhibits

April 12-29—Andrew Valdivia, Graduate Thesis Exhibit, "Experiments" in Painting. Union Gallery.

April-May—Latino Awareness Displays. Minority Resource/Research Center.

Speakers

April 26—Jerry Apodaca, governor of New Mexico, will be a K-State convocation speaker at 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, in McCain Auditorium.

April 29—Dr. Sabine Ulibarri, Professor and Chairman, Modern and Classical Languages, University of New Mexico. Room 212, KSU Union. 10:30 a.m.

April 30—Mr. Efrain Gutierrez, director and producer of the film, "Please Don't Bury Me Alive." Little Theater, KSU Union. 7:30 p.m.

May 2—Mr. Jaime Apodaca, Instructor, Chicano Studies, Wichita State University. "Chicano Literature." Room 213, KSU Union. 10:30 a.m.

May 3—Mr. Willie Garibay, Chicano lawyer, Denver, Colorado. "Contemporary Problems of the Chicano." Room 213, KSU Union. 10:30 a.m.

Movies

April 30—"Please Don't Bury Me Alive." Union Little Theater. 7:30 p.m.

Concerts, Plays

May 1—"El Hombre Que se Convirtio en Perro," Teatro de la Gente. McCain Auditorium. 7:30 p.m.

May 5—Mr. Ramon Hernandez, Classical guitarist, Taos, New Mexico. Catskeller. 6:30

Miscellaneous

April 23—Potluck Banquet featuring Congresswoman Martha Keys and Mr. George Vega. First National Bank, Juliette and Poyntz. 7:00-10:00 p.m.

May 2—Literary presentation of Chicano poetry. Featuring Jaime Apodaca, Lucy Chartrand, Teresa Guillen, Sonya Rodriguez and Miguel Aragon. Big Eight Room, KSU Union. 7:00 p.m.

May 2—Bus trip to Sacred Circles, Nelson Gallery, Kansas City, Missouri. Kansas State Native American Art Series. Departs from KSU Union. 12:00 noon.*

July 12-16—Fiesta Mexicana. Topeka, Kansas

*Watch *Collegian* for further information